

**HENRY COWELL**  
**TONE CLUSTER PIECES AND OTHER PIANO MUSIC**

Advertisement (1914)

Aeolian Harp (1923)

The Banshee (1925)

The Tides of Manaunaun (1912)

Sinister Resonance (1930)

Lilt of the Reel (1925)

Henry Cowell, piano

**PRELUDE FOR VIOLIN AND HARPSICHORD**

Robert Brink and Daniel Pinkham

**DANIEL PINKHAM**

**CONCERTO FOR CELESTE AND HARPSICHORD**

Prelude-Ricercare-Canzona

Edward Low and Daniel Pinkham

**CANTILENA**

**CAPRICCIO**

Robert Brink and Daniel Pinkham

**ALAN HOVHANESS**

**DUET FOR VIOLIN AND HARPSICHORD**

Robert Brink and Daniel Pinkham

In 1954, on the occasion of Henry Cowell's twenty-fifth anniversary as a teacher at the New School for Social Research, the New York Herald Tribune carried a headline: **COWELL: PECK'S BAD BOY OF MUSIC**. It was, if one accepts the degree of overstatement natural to headline prose, an apt description of the composer. For few musicians have so happily romped through the vast and ever-changing materials of music, molding them into handsome, piquant shapes and maintaining an utter simplicity, sincerity, and audacity of creative disposition in the process. Most composers finally settle for a routine. Henry Cowell never did.

In 1923, when he was playing his own compositions in Leipzig, reaction in the audience grew so excited that fighting broke out and the police had to be called. In London, piano manufacturers were congratulated on building instruments capable of taking such a beating. And, in New York, the bout between “Kid Knabe” and “Battling Cowell” was covered for the newspapers by a sports critic. At the same time, and on the more serious side, such perceptive and knowledgeable people as Artur Schnabel, Bela Bartok, and the painter Kandinsky ranged themselves behind Cowell and sponsored appearances in Berlin, Paris, and at the Bauhaus. Controversy certainly occurred in his career. But respect, enjoyment, and acceptance followed apace.

Cowell, like most composers, approached his work with disarming naturalness. “I do not see at all,” he said, “why a composer’s choice should be limited to the musical materials used in Europe for the past three hundred and fifty years alone. What interests me is music itself as organized sound, its forms, and all the possibilities of a musical idea, to write as beautifully, as warmly and as interestingly as I can.”

Among materials which have not been customarily used in older, European music, Cowell’s “tone clusters” rank as the most noticeable. He did not claim their invention, although in 1911 and 1912, when he first began to experiment with them, he was not aware that his predecessor in American iconoclasm, Charles Ives, had also been intrigued with their possibilities. The name, *tone clusters*, however, musical history owes to Cowell, as well as a number of fascinating ideas for their employment, some of which are exemplified in this recording. The virtuoso piece, **ADVERTISEMENT**, for example, bases itself upon their usage, as does **THE TIDES OF MANAUNAUN**, although the final effect is strongly contrasted.

Another “shocking” idea which Henry Cowell introduced into his esthetic is that of playing *inside* the piano instead of outside. (**THE BANSHEE**; **SINISTER RESONANCE**; **THE AEOLIAN HARP**, are so performed.) “You know,” he said, “I’ve done a lot of new things, not just to do something new, but because I imagined that that was the way to find out about music. For example, in the 1920’s it struck me that a person could play inside a piano, on the strings, just as easily as he could play on the keys. So I developed a number of systems to prove my thesis . . . Once I used an egg, a darning egg, to make the strings sound. And on other occasions, I’ve used paper cutters and ordinary spoons and pencils placed between the strings and vibrated. It creates a sonority like this—Drrrrrr.” John Cage later used similar methods to create his “prepared pianos.”

Today, Henry Cowell is most often thought of as a composer of orchestral works. He completed 20 symphonies, as well as a vast number of choral works and pieces for solo instruments. “Henry Cowell’s music,” writes Virgil Thomson, “covers a wider range in both expression and technique

than that of any other living composer . . . No other composer of our time has produced a body of work so radical and so normal, so penetrating and so comprehensive. Add to this massive production his long and influential career as pedagogue, and Henry Cowell's achievement in music becomes impressive indeed. There is no other quite like it. To be both fecund and right is given to few."

Henry Cowell was born at Menlo Park, California on March 11, 1897 and died in 1965. His early training included study with Charles Seeger in California; with Schönberg in Berlin; and work at the Institute of Applied Music. He was the recipient of an honorary Doctorate in Music from Wilmington College and awards from the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the Guggenheim Foundation. His Fifth Symphony was commissioned by Hans Kindler; the Sixth and Seventh by Fabien Sevitsky for the Steinway Centennial in 1953; and the Tenth by the Vienna Philharmonic. The Eleventh Symphony was commissioned and recorded by the Louisville Orchestra.

Probably no musical instrument displaced from usage by the march of musical events has ever been so thoroughly returned to favor as has the harpsichord in recent years. During the 16th and 17th centuries, before invention of the "hammer" piano, the spruce and pungent timbre of the harpsichord (variously known as clavicembalo, cembalo, clavecin, and virginal) reigned supreme among the keyboard instruments. Indeed, even after its displacement by the pianoforte in concert life, its usefulness as an operatic accompanist continued for a long time. Composers of the Romantic period, however, neglected the instrument, and it remained for those of the 20th century to reinstate the clear, rational sonority of the quill plucked string to its deserved position of importance.

Since 1948, the young American composer, Daniel Pinkham, and violinist Robert Brink, who are heard on this recording, have toured extensively in Europe and North America as the Brink-Pinkham Violin and Harpsichord Duo. They have performed not only standard literature of the 17th and 18th centuries, but contemporary works as well. All three pieces for violin and harpsichord here recorded were composed especially for the Duo.

The CONCERTO FOR CELESTE AND HARPSICHORD by Daniel Pinkham was written for a concert which took place on November 19, 1955 in the McMillin Theatre of Columbia University. It was completed in the single week preceding the concert and performed on that occasion by the composer and Edward Low. They also record it here. The work, dedicated to Henry Cowell, presents a unique and delightful experience in sonorities. The incisiveness of the harpsichord's tone; the ability of the celeste both to blend with and to stand out in contrast against the plucked sounds; and the essential delicacy of both instruments, all serve to create an extremely beautiful fusion of

colors. The **PRELUDE** (which bears a strong resemblance to parts of the **CAPRICCIO FOR VIOLIN AND HARPSICHORD** also included on this disc) is written largely in a five-eight meter. The serene **RICERCARE** consists of two fugues, the subject of the second being an inversion of the first. From a quiet opening for solo harpsichord, it builds seriously and without haste to the resounding climax. The concluding **CANZONA** is brash, brilliant, and altogether entertaining.

Pinkham's **CANTILENA** and the **CAPRICCIO FOR VIOLIN AND HARPSICHORD**, are concerned with the establishment of moods—in the case of the **CANTILENA**, one of tenderness and warmth; in the **CAPRICCIO**, one exemplifying energy, boisterousness, and athleticism. Both works, incidentally, have also been orchestrated by the composer.

Daniel Pinkham was born at Lynn, Massachusetts on June 5, 1923. The major portion of his musical study was done at Harvard, where he worked primarily with Walter Piston. Later studies were pursued with Samuel Barber, Arthur Honegger, and Nadia Boulanger. He has frequently been heard as harpsichordist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and is a skilled conductor as well. His works include a piano concertino, an organ concertino, a chamber opera, ballet music, a set of sonatas, and numerous songs and choral pieces.

Alan Hovhaness' **DUET FOR VIOLIN AND HARPSICHORD** was commissioned on May 16, 1954, composed on May 17, and given its first performance two weeks later in Frankfurt, Germany. The opening **PRELUDE** presents a broad melodic line in the violin, interrupted by violent chords from the harpsichord. The second movement, entitled **HAIKU** (a Japanese poetic form), gives to the harpsichord a running, four-note ostinato, while the violin is heard in a wideranging series of bowed tones, harmonics, glissandi, and plucked double stops. The concluding **ARIA** is straightforward, sunny, and passionate, with an uncomplicated chordal accompaniment in the keyboard instrument.

Alan Hovhaness was born in Somerville, Massachusetts on March 8, 1911, the son of a chemistry professor, Haroutiun Hovhaness Chakmakjian and Madeline Scott Chakmakjian. He began to compose systematically by the time he was eight years old. He studied briefly at Tufts College, and succeeding this, his teachers in piano were Adelaide Proctor and Heinrich Gebhard, both of whom became encouraging champions of the young musician. His teachers in composition were Frederick Converse and, at the Berkshire Music Center, Bohuslav Martinu.

—notes by Lester Trimble

*(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*

